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The delegation of the U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom (USCIRF) completed its visit to Egypt on Saturday, March 24 and travels to Saudi Arabia and then to Israel and the Occupied Territories. Three members of the Commission visited Egypt: Elliott Abrams, chairman of the Commission, Dr. Firuz Kazemzadeh, Commission vice-chairman, and Commissioner Dr. Laila Al-Marayati. They will report to the rest of the nine-member Commission about the visit. No findings or conclusions can or will be made by the Commission until all Commission members have been informed about the trip.

"The Commission wishes to thank the Government of Egypt and the officials with whom we met: Sheikh Tantawi, Grand Imam of Al-Azhar, His Holiness Pope Shenouda III, as well as other clergy who spoke with us; and the academics, journalists, and experts who helped us better understand the state of religious freedom in this important country," commented Elliott Abrams, head of the delegation and chairman of the Commission. "We had been planning for this trip since last summer and it was most informative." The Commission set its travel agenda for the year 2001 shortly after the release of its first report on May 1, 2000.

"The goal of our trip here was to learn firsthand from the Egyptian government, Muslim and Christian clergy and laity, intellectuals, academics, and other experts," Abrams explained. "Under U.S. Law the Commission advises the President, Secretary of State,

and the U.S. Congress, not the Egyptian or any other foreign government. Our job is to think about the effects of U.S. foreign policy on religious freedom in various countries. This visit has been very useful to us in performing that job, and we are very grateful to Ambassador Kurtzer and the staff of the U.S. Embassy for helping us achieve it."

The USCIRF is mandated to advise the U.S. government on how to promote religious freedom for persons of all faiths. Its Web site (www.uscifr.gov) reflects the Commission's efforts on behalf of religious liberty around the world, including India, China, Nigeria, and Vietnam.